

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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ROME FOR VATICAN OFFICE

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PEPR, SOCI, BU, VT
SUBJECT: BULGARIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF CORONATION OF POPE JOHN
PAUL I

REF: A) SOFIA 1824, B) SOFIA 1700

1. EVENTS IN ROME CONTINUED TO RECEIVE COVERAGE IN THE
BULGARIAN PRESS DURING THE PERIOD SEPT 4-6. IT WAS
REPORTED THAT THE CEREMONIAL MASS WAS ATTENDED BY A
BULGARIAN DELEGATION HEADED BY MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY
GEORGIY STOYANOV, THE SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE CHAIRMAN OF
THE STATE COUNCIL, TODOR ZHIVKOV. OTHER DELEGATION
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MEMBERS WERE BISHOP OF LOVECH GRIGORIY OF THE BULGARIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH AND BISHOP METODIY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN BULGARIA.

2. TRUD (LABOR) AND ZEMEDELSKO ZNAME (AGRICULTURE FLAG),
AMONG OTHER NEWSPAPERS, REPORTED THAT POPE JOHN PAUL I
RECEIVED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

AT THE VATICAN ON SEPT 5. THE BISHOP OF LOVECH GRIGORIY CONVEYED A CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO THE POPE FROM THE BULGARIAN PATRIARCH MAXIM. ZEMEDELSKO ZNAME AND OTECHESTVEN FRONT (FATHERLAND FRONT) CARRIED A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE NEW POPE AND NOTED THAT BY CHOOSING THE NAME OF POPE JOHN PAUL I, THE NEW POPE EVIDENTLY WANTED TO INDICATE THAT HE INTENDS TO FOLLOW THE COURSE MAPPED OUT BY HIS TWO PRE-DECESSORS. IT COMMENTED THAT THE NEW POPE IS EXPECTED TO DEVELOP SOME OF POPE PAUL VI'S THEOLOGICAL IDEAS AND THAT HE WILL CONTINUE THE HERETOFORE REALISTIC APPROACH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLES REMAIN BURIED WITH LESS SIGNIFICANT DATA, THEY INDICATE THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT WISHES TO CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN CORRECT RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN. AS IS WELL KNOWN, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WAS HEAVILY PERSECUTED DURING THE LATE '40S AND EARLY '50S. SINCE THE MID '60S, THE EARLIER EXCESSES HAVE CEASED, BUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS NOT RECOVERED FROM ITS EMASCULATION. IN THE ENVIRONS OF SOFIA, THERE ARE SEVERAL SMALL CATHOLIC CHURCHES WHICH HOLD SERVICES, AND THERE IS A SMALL NUNNERY IN SOFIA (WHERE POPE JOHN XXIII, AS A YOUNG MAN, SERVED FROM 1926 TILL 1932). THE SISTERS OF THE NUNNERY HAVE TOLD US THEY ARE RELUCTANT TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC IN THEIR HABITS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT WISH TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES.

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4. INTERESTINGLY, IN THE PLOVDIV REGION, SOMETHING OF A CENTER FOR CATHOLICISM IN BULGARIA, THE GREEK CONSUL GENERAL INFORMS US THAT CONSIDERABLE REHABILITATION OF OLD CATHOLIC CHURCHES IS UNDERWAY, AND SERVICES ARE HELD ON A REGULAR BASIS. REHABILITATION, OF COURSE, COULD NOT PROCEED WITHOUT AT LEAST TACIT APPROVAL OF THE LOCAL PARTY STRUCTURE, AND IT LEADS TO SPECULATION THAT SOME CATHOLICS MAY, IN FACT, HAVE MOVED INTO THE LOCAL LEADERSHIP. END COMMENT.

GARTHOFF

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